

Draft Your Basic Cover Letter

Estimated time needed: 30 minutes

One of the most important items to develop when you begin a job search is a basic cover letter. It's a good idea to draft a basic cover letter before you start applying for work. You'll adapt the letter to each position and application, of course, but you can start with a basic template.

Learning objectives

After completing this lab, you will be able to:

- Create a basic cover letter
- Describe how to edit the letter to fit different job applications

Prerequisites

You will need the following to complete the exercises in this lab:

- Word processing software
- A source of information about your past work experience (a resume might be useful)
- An example job listing to practice tailoring the letter to a specific role

Your cover letter will work along with your resume to introduce you to a prospective employer. It should briefly introduce you and make a case for why you are a strong candidate for a particular position. Don't repeat all of your qualifications – your resume and LinkedIn will contain the details. Include enough information to show you are well qualified and pique the interest of the reader just enough to want more details.

Exercise 1: Begin your letter

In this exercise, you will open and start your letter.

To write a cover letter, open with a greeting and address the letter to a specific person whenever possible. If you don't know a name, address it to the title of the person you hope will see the letter, such as "Dear Hiring Manager." Use correct business punctuation.

In the first paragraph, state the title of the job to which you're applying, and why you feel you might be a good fit. It's also sometimes useful to mention where you saw the job listed or who referred you. You should also express why you are enthusiastic about the company.

Example

Dear Mr. Ericson

I was excited when my colleague Juma Navarro told me your company had an opening for a Data Analyst. I admire the products developed by Torontoni Software, and am interested in joining your team. I am a data analyst with 3 years of professional experience and skills that match your needs, and I think I am a strong candidate.

Exercise 2: Write the main body of the letter

In this exercise, you will write the first paragraph of your letter.

Build a case for your strengths as a candidate. Cite a few examples from your experience that match the skills they mentioned in the job listing; draw parallels between the listing and your resume and portfolio. Quantify your experiences when possible. However, keep this brief and focused. Pick some best examples and keep some of your work to discuss further when you interview.

Example

In my most recent role, I maintained and extended a mission-critical database and prepared a weekly report of changes and trends for stakeholders. I also worked with the coding and management teams to improve functionality of the database by 45%, advised on compliance issues, and supervised the work of 2 interns. I know SQL and Python, have intermediate proficiency in Hadoop and Apache Spark, and am experienced using Tableau for visualization.

Exercise 3: Close your letter

In this exercise, you will close your letter.

Close by restating your interest, say you hope to meet with them further, and then add a polite signoff.

Example

Thank you for your consideration. I would love to bring my skills to Torontoni Software, and I'm eager to discuss the contributions I can make to your team.

Best regards,

Olivia Torvald

Tips

- On a practical note, you will want to save your letter in Microsoft Word format because many companies prefer it.
- You will also need a plain text version so that you can easily copy and paste the text into an online application form. A PDF file can also be useful, although you'll have to create a new version every time you modify the letter.
- Have someone you trust proofread your letter to be sure you are not eliminated because your letter contains errors.
- If you have a cloud storage space like Google Docs or Dropbox, save your cover letter there so that you can always find it easily using any device.

Conclusion

Writing this letter in a modular and straightforward way will make it easier to adapt later, since you will want to change some of the text to fit each role you apply to. Like a news story or a headline, writing clearly and concisely will catch the interest of a hiring manager. Making a good case for yourself as a candidate will motivate them to read your resume and, hopefully, call you for an interview.

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